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SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: LOCAL IRAQIS CONSIDER DISTRICT/SUB-DISTRICT ELECTIONS CRITICAL FOR PROGRESS

Classified By: PRT Salah Ad Din team leader Rick Bell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Salah ad Din (SaD) reporting cable.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The postponement of local (District and Sub-District level) elections presents a major obstacle to the development of democracy in SaD Province. Currently, local officials in SaD lack legitimacy because they were largely appointed by CF/DoS under the CPA, rather than elected by Iraqis. There is a growing imbalance of legitimacy between sub-provincial officials and those elected at provincial and national levels, making it extremely difficult for local officials to lobby higher levels for resources. Many local officials are fatigued and demoralized from years of living with a dysfunctional system. Since cities are run by sub-provincial officials, there is little chance of establishing effective governance at the basic level until new officials with legitimacy and motivation take office. Without that, Iraqis will continue to try to cope, working around their government and falling back on tribalism. The optimism shown by the high turn-out in the January provincial elections risks being frittered away if local elections are delayed too long. END SUMMARY.

UNELECTED OFFICIALS LACK LEGITIMACY

¶2. (SBU) Local officials lack legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents and other government officials because the process by which they entered office is not considered legitimate. Most were appointed by Americans under CPA, and have been maintaining their positions since; some are less than enthusiastic about public service. It is a commonly-held view that most local officials are corrupt and incompetent. Even the few officials considered honest and capable still use their influence to pass out benefits along tribal lines. Many local officials are fatigued and demoralized from years of working in a dysfunctional governance system in the face of complaints from their constituents and threats from insurgents.

¶3. (C) For their part, local officials complain that they have no money and get virtually no support from provincial or national level authorities (NOTE: The lowest level of governance with budgetary authority is the province. END NOTE). There may also be a lapse in their legal authority: some in SaD believe that the new Provincial Powers Law (PPL) applies to sub-provincial levels until after new officials are elected and take office. Local officials have complained to the PRT that their lack of authority hinders their dealings with private investors, who need an authoritative negotiating partner. The lack of authority also contributes to the widely-held view that all officials below provincial level are ineffective.

¶4. (C) We are already seeing examples of reduced reliance on

district and sub-district government. In the district of Tuz, the two sub-districts (Amerli and Sulayman Beg) refuse to work through district officials, taking all of their business directly to the Provincial Council. A senior political party leader in Tuz, (head of ISCI) Ali Hashem, told the PRT that all three Tuz councils need to be "refreshed." Similarly, senior officials from the district of Ad-Dawr have complained to the PRT that local sheikhs are in the habit of completely bypassing the district council and representing the tribes directly with provincial officials.

¶ 15. (SBU) Local officials face the additional challenge of learning to function in the new system of decentralized democratic governance. This is a considerable challenge for democratic governance. This is a considerable challenge for local officials: initiative was discouraged under the former (centralized, undemocratic) system, but is necessary under a decentralized system. Local officials find it difficult to lobby effectively for their priorities when they lack legitimacy in the eyes of those at higher levels of government.

¶ 16. (SBU) PRT contacts report an overwhelming popular consensus in favor of open-list elections (in which the voters know who each list's candidates are and can vote for specific candidates) as opposed to closed-list (in which the lists do not even have to decide whom to put in office until after the elections, when they know how many seats they have won).

EMBASSY BAGHDAD COMMENT

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¶ 17. (C) As the PPL goes into effect, we hear reports that provincial councils are centralizing their authority. In many cases, this means taking authority from district councils in order to consolidate power within the newly elected provincial councils. District and sub-district politicians can be left feeling powerless, and eager to participate in elections of their own. However, the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) tells us that it will not be able to administer local elections until there is a clear understanding of district and sub-district boundaries. END EMBASSY BAGHDAD COMMENT.

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